

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

ELECTRIC COOKING APPARATUS AND METHOD OF CONTROLLING THE SAME

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims the benefit of Korean Patent Application No. 2003-63004, filed on September 09, 2003 in the Korean Intellectual Property Office, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

[0002] The present invention relates, in general, to an electric cooking apparatus, and more particularly, to an electric cooking apparatus and method of controlling the same which heats a cooking container put on a cooking plate using heating units located under the cooking plate, and cooks food.

2. Description of the Related Art

[0003] Generally, an electric cooking apparatus is an apparatus which converts electric energy into thermal energy, and heats and cooks food using the thermal energy.

[0004] Generally, the electric cooking apparatus includes a body casing. A heating device is placed in the body casing to provide heat. Additionally, a cooking plate is mounted on an upper part of the body casing to allow a cooking container to be put thereon. A mark is indicated at a location of the cooking plate corresponding to the heating device so that a user puts the cooking container thereon.

[0005] However, a conventional electric cooking apparatus is inconvenient in that the user must put the cooking container at a pre-designated location on the cooking plate corresponding to the heating device because the location of the conventional heating device is fixed.

[0006] Furthermore, the conventional electric cooking apparatus is problematic in that unnecessary energy loss is incurred if the cooking container is not precisely located at the pre-designated location on the cooking plate corresponding to the heating units.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] Accordingly, it is an aspect of the present invention to provide an electric cooking apparatus and method of controlling the electric cooking apparatus, which allow a heating position to be automatically changed according to a location and size of a cooking container located on a cooking plate.

[0008] Additional aspects and/or advantages of the invention will be set forth in part in the description which follows and, in part, will be obvious from the description, or may be learned by practice of the invention.

[0009] The foregoing and/or other aspects are achieved by providing an electric cooking apparatus, comprising heating units each heating unit having a heating element and electrodes connected to the heating element, a switching unit to switch power applied to the electrodes, a current detecting unit to detect values of current output from the heating units, and a control unit to operate a predetermined number of the heating units, which are determined according to the values of current detected from the current detecting unit after operating the heating units.

[0010] It is another aspect of the present invention to provide an electric cooking apparatus, including heating units each heating unit having a heating element and electrodes connected to the heating element, a switching unit to switch power to be supplied to the electrodes, and a control unit to separately operate the heating units by operating the switching unit.

[0011] It is another aspect of the present invention to provide a method of controlling an electric cooking apparatus, an electric cooking apparatus having heating units each heating unit having a heating element and electrodes connected to the heating element, and a switching unit to switch power to be applied to the electrodes, the method comprising detecting values of current output from the heating units after operating the heating units, and operating a predetermined number of heating units determined according to the detected values of current.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] These and/or other aspects and advantages of the invention will become apparent and more readily appreciated from the following description of the embodiments, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings of which:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an electric cooking apparatus, according to the present invention;

FIG. 2 is an exploded perspective view showing main components of the electric cooking apparatus of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a front view showing assembled main components of the electric cooking apparatus of FIG. 1;

FIG. 4 is a control block diagram of the electric cooking apparatus, according to the present invention;

FIG. 5 is a control flowchart showing a method of controlling the electric cooking apparatus, according to the present invention; and

FIG. 6 is a view showing that a heating location is changed when the cooking container is moved to another location.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0013] Reference will now be made in detail to the embodiments of the present invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings, wherein like reference numerals refer to like elements throughout. The embodiments are described below to explain the present invention by referring to the figures.

[0014] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an electric cooking apparatus, according to the present invention. In FIG. 1, the electric cooking apparatus of the present invention comprises a body casing 10. A cooking plate 12, on which a cooking container 11 is located, is mounted on an upper part of the body casing 10. Heating units 20 are located in the body casing 10 under the cooking plate 12 and provide heat to the cooking plate 12. The heating units 20 are operated by a control device 30. Furthermore, a plurality of control buttons 13 are provided on one side of the body casing 10 to input commands to the control device 30 to operate the heating units 20.

[0015] The user causes the electric cooking apparatus to perform cooking by operating the heating units 20 using relevant control buttons 13 after putting the cooking container 11 on the cooking plate 12.

[0016] FIG. 2 is an exploded perspective view showing main components of the electric cooking apparatus of FIG. 1. FIG. 3 is a front view of the assembled main components of the electric cooking apparatus of FIG. 1. In FIGS. 2 and 3, an electric cooking apparatus comprises

a thermally conductive cooking plate 12 to allow the cooking container 11 to be located thereon. The thermally conductive cooking plate 12 is made of a ceramic glass.

[0017] The heating units 20 which provide heat to a lower part of the cooking plate 12 are located under the cooking plate 12 at predetermined intervals. A heat-insulating material 15 is located under the heating units 20, and a support plate 14 is located under the heat-insulating material 15. Furthermore, a support frame 16 is located around the support plate 14 to support the control device 30 which operates the heating units 20.

[0018] Each of the heating units 20 comprises a sheet-heating element 21 formed by printing a heat-generating paint under the thermally conductive cooking plate 12 in rectangular cells, and a pair of electrodes 22 and 23 connected to both ends of the sheet-heating element 21, respectively, to supply power thereto.

[0019] Each of the electrodes 22 and 23 of the heating units 20 is electrically connected to the control device 30 through an electrical connecting member 24.

[0020] Accordingly, the control device 30 may operate the heating units 20 separately or in groups by supplying or cutting off power to the electrodes 22 and 23, so that not only an entire region but also a localized region of the cooking plate 12 may be used as a cooking region.

[0021] Furthermore, each of the heating units 20 operate as a heating element and a location-detecting sensor which detects a location and size of the cooking container 11, details of which will be described later.

[0022] FIG. 4 is a control block diagram, according to the present invention. In FIG. 4, the electric cooking apparatus of the present invention comprising a control unit 40 to perform overall control.

[0023] A key input unit 50 having the plurality of control buttons 13 to receive cooking commands from the user is electrically connected to an input side of the control unit 40.

[0024] Furthermore, the heating units 20 connected in parallel to each other are electrically connected to an output side of the control unit 40. An (-) electrode 23 of each of the heating units 20 is connected to the control unit 40 as a common electrode, and an (+) electrode 22 thereof is connected to the control unit 40.

[0025] Furthermore, the control unit 40 comprises a power supply circuit 41 to supply a certain amount of power thereto, a switching circuit 42 to switch the power supplied from the power supply circuit 41 to respective electrodes, and a current detecting circuit 43 to detect changes in current in the heating units 20 supplied with the power.

[0026] Generally, a rate of change of resistance of the sheet-heating element 21 changes depending on whether the cooking container 11 exists at a location of the cooking plate 12 corresponding to the sheet-heating element 21 inside the heating unit 20. Accordingly, depending on whether the cooking container exists, a value of current in the heating unit 20 is changed by the sheet-heating element 21. Therefore, the control unit 40 supplies the power to each of the heating units 20 through the switching circuit 42 subsequently, detects the change of current in each of the heating units 20 through the current detecting circuit 43, and analyzes the rate of change of current, so that whether the cooking container 11 exists at the location of the cooking plate 12 corresponding to each of the heating units 20 may be recognized and the location and size of the cooking container 11 may be detected.

[0027] FIG. 5 is a control flowchart showing a method of controlling the electric cooking apparatus, according to the present invention. In FIG. 5, the user puts food into the cooking container 11 and places the cooking container 11 on the cooking plate 12.

[0028] The control unit 40 determines whether the control button 13, which operates the electric cooking apparatus, has been pressed by the user in operation 100.

[0029] When it is determined that the control button has been pressed, the control unit 40 determines the heating units 20 corresponding to a location and size of the cooking container 11, and operates the determined heating units 20.

[0030] To determine the heating units 20 corresponding to the location and size of the cooking container 11, the control unit 40 sequentially supplies power through the switching circuit 42 to sequentially operate the heating units 20 in operation 110. After sequentially supplying the power to the heating units 20, the control unit 40 detects values of current in the heating units 20 through the current detecting circuit 43 for a certain period of time in operation 120. As described above, when the power is applied to the electrodes 22 and 23 of the heating units 20, the sheet-heating elements 21 generate heat. Since rates of change of resistance of the sheet-heating elements 21 are different depending on whether the cooking container 11

exists or not at the location of the cooking plate 12, the rates of change of current detected by the current detecting circuit 43 vary with time. In operation 130, the control unit 40 calculates the rates of change of current based on the values of current detected in the operation 120. Additionally, in operation 140, the control unit 40 determines the heating units 20 having rates of change of current equal to or higher than a preset rate of change of current. Accordingly, when the rate of change of current of each of the heating units 20 is equal to or higher than the preset rate of change of current, the cooking container 11 is located on the location of the cooking plate 12 corresponding to the heating units 20. As a result, when the heating units 20 having the rates of change of current are operated, only a portion of the cooking plate 12 on which the cooking container 11 is located, is heated.

[0031] Thereafter, in operation 150 the control unit 40 operates the heating units 20 determined in operation 140. Consequently, the control unit 40 operates the heating units 20 which correspond to the location and size of the cooking container 11, so that unnecessary energy loss may be reduced.

[0032] The control unit 40 periodically determines whether the cooking container exists on the cooking plate 12 in a same manner as described above while operating the heating units 20. If the cooking container 11 is moved to another location, as shown in FIG. 6, the control unit 40 detects the new location and then operates the heating units 20 corresponding to the detected new location. Furthermore, if another cooking container is placed on the cooking plate 12, the control unit 40 periodically determines whether the cooking container 11 exists on the cooking plate 12 by checking remaining heating units except for heating units 20 currently being operated, and automatically and additionally operates the heating units 20.

[0033] As described above in detail, the electric cooking apparatus may heat the cooking container without regard to the location of the cooking container on the cooking plate, so that convenience for the user is improved.

[0034] Furthermore, the electric cooking apparatus heats only the portion of the cooking plate in contact with the cooking container without regard to the size of the cooking container, so that the present invention reduces unnecessary energy loss.

[0035] Although a few preferred embodiment of the present invention have been shown and described, it would be appreciated by those skilled in the art that changes may be made in this

embodiment without departing from the principles and spirit of the invention, the scope of which is defined in the claims and their equivalents.